



### Introduction – Why establish a national deaf association

One of the most important functions of an organization for deaf people is to offer an opportunity for them to meet with each other which also offers an opportunity for natural interaction and communication for its members. In its initial stage, the organization can be informal and unofficial merely offering its members a sense of togetherness.

In many countries, information is not provided in national sign language so deaf people do not have access to information such as their rights as deaf citizens, where to seek help or how to look for a job. Another important task for an organization is to offer its members information about the surrounding society, its services and news. The national association of the deaf in many countries provides information via SMS or internet, such as on social media and WhatsApp/Telegram. It is important that information is provided in national sign language. Alternatively, organize meetings where you pass on information to the deaf community. When deaf people meet with each other regularly, they receive information from each other. They learn social skills as well as how to live within the mainstream society. This will increase the self-confidence of the members.

The most important function of an organization of the deaf is to campaign collectively for social change. Deaf people are entitled to equal opportunities in society: Education, employment, economic independence, access to community services, access to information, access to specialist services, marriage and raising a family. They possess an important role in improving the situation of deaf people, promoting social change, and creating a better environment, acting as a pressure group with the government to defend human rights and encouraging policy change, coming together to share ideas, and creating solutions. For example, several deaf associations have succeeded in the recognition of sign language in their country after establishing a national association of the deaf.

How do deaf associations benefit their members?

- Provide training and other educational opportunities
- Provide programs and services
- Collect and share information, research, statistics
- Set up standards, code of ethics, certification (i.e. sign language interpreting)
- A place to discuss common problems and solutions
- Provide a community of interest
- Representation at the government level

How do associations benefit society?

- Can provide assistance to governmental officials at the national, state and local levels
- Promote awareness and acceptance of diversity
- Help other groups with similar needs in advocacy and lobbying activities
- Provide training and educational opportunities to the general public (i.e. sign language classes)
- Supplement services that are not provided



### How to start?

There are two different scenarios when establishing a national association: You do neither have a national association nor local deaf clubs, or you have regional or other kinds of associations, but you do not have an organization operating at a national level.

If we look at the history of the organizations of the deaf, many of them have been established by former students at a deaf school, who wished to keep in contact and meet each other after completing their education. This kind of beginning is quite natural, and it also saves the trouble of locating the prospective founding members. So, the students who are about to finish school are recommended to discuss the matter before leaving if there is no organization of the deaf in their country.

Although the formation of an organization is described shortly in this module, it must be understood that it may be a long and slow process which may take years. Factors influencing the success of forming an organization include the level of education and awareness of deaf persons, the opportunity of meeting regularly, the availability of necessary funds, etc. These factors vary considerably from one country to another. It is advisable to bear this in mind when reading the lines below so as not to rush the process.

### 1. Locating prospective members

The very first step might be to discuss the idea of meeting regularly with your deaf friends. You can form a group and start looking for other deaf persons. If you do not know where they live, find out. Contact your local health center, rehabilitation workers, community development workers, agricultural extension workers, field representatives of non-governmental organizations, especially of other organizations of people with disabilities in the community, teachers, and members of national coordination committees of the disabled. They may know where to find deaf people.

### 2. Establishing contact with deaf and their families

When you know where to find other deaf persons, go out and talk to them and their families. Explain the purpose of regular meetings of deaf persons: Get together, exchange experiences, share information on society, deafness, and sign language. It is important to inform other members of the family about the aim of the meetings because families may not permit their deaf members to attend meetings of deaf or deaf associations because they have been suspicious about what is going on. This specifically applies to girls and women. It is important for a deaf person to have the support of the family.

### 3. Organizing the first public meeting

The next step is to organize a public meeting of deaf persons. All deaf persons who can be located should be encouraged to attend. The purpose of the first meeting is to discuss problems and possible solutions. At this stage it is advisable to consider whether the organization to be formed is going to be a national association of the deaf or a local club of



the deaf. As the communication skills of the people attending the meeting may vary, try to find solutions that enable active and equal participation. Do not leave out deaf persons who do not sign because this may be their first contact with sign language. Try to find volunteers who can write down what is being signed. Even deaf persons with no communication skills at all should not be left out although it is hard to ensure equal participation for them. With them try to use local gestures to explain the issues being discussed.

Remember to pick a time and date when people are likely to be able to attend. Pick your venue and get permission to use it on your meeting day. Will it cost you any money? If yes, can money be raised at the meeting, or can a supporter cover the expense? Can you find a venue that will not cost money? A small venue which is crowded makes better atmosphere for the meeting than a large room that is not crowded. Make sure that during the meeting everyone can see each other. The venue should be close to public transportation. Make sure that venue is accessible for everyone – for example for old people and people who have a physical disability.

When people arrive to the first public meeting, get them to write down their names and addresses in a register. A person should open the meeting with words of welcome and introductions. After this, a chairperson to coordinate and secretary to take notes should be chosen. Everyone should be encouraged to explain their ideas. Next, the idea of forming an organization of the deaf can be discussed. If the response is positive, the model for the establishment of an organization should be presented for discussion, modification, and agreement. This would include a statement of goals and objectives. It should also include the procedure of electing a board (5-11 people) to represent the views and opinions of members and to organize the work to be carried out. After discussion and agreement of the constitution, the meeting should vote.

There should be a call for nominations to the board. If there are more people interested than there are vacant positions, ask each nominee to speak briefly, take a vote and announce the result. If there are more vacancies than nominees, declare the nominees elected and the board can invite other nominations later. The chairperson should thank everyone for attending, especially those providing assistance. The chairperson's concluding statement should leave the audience feeling that the new organization can bring about positive change and that members together can influence decision makers and improve the life for deaf people. The new board should arrange to meet as soon as possible after the public meeting to plan its activities and start work.

#### **4. Get support**

Can NGOs or hearing families of the deaf help by providing transportation to the meeting? Try to find volunteers who can assist with cooking and childcare during the meeting. The WFD regional secretariat may be able to help. They can explain about the work of other deaf organizations in your region, or neighbour country: How they established the organization and how they have solved the problem of getting started. For further assistance, approach organizations of other groups of people with disabilities, your local government officials, or NGOs.



### **5. Official registration of the organization**

After the formation of the organization, you should investigate the possibility of official registration in accordance with your government regulations. The benefits of being registered as well as registration requirements and procedures differ from country to country. Benefits of organization may be receipt of tax exemption status as a non-profit organization and / or becoming an official entity which can receive government grants and funds from funding organizations. In some countries, an organization must operate for at least one year before it can apply for registration. Therefore, it is important to contact the government agency which deals with official registration of NGOs to determine the exact requirements and procedures. There are some common requirements that your organization may meet when applying for official registration, for example constitution of the organization and minutes of the meetings.

### **6. Setting goals and objectives and statutes**

After the organization has been established, the board should discuss the goals and objectives. The notes from the first meeting and recommendations of the WFD should be discussed. It is important that decision making procedure is laid down by the constitution of your organization. Decisions on goals and objectives are usually made at the general meeting where all members are involved. It is important to involve members in decision making. Long-term goals are defined as something that the organization wishes to reach as its ultimate goal and short-term goals reflect the ideas the organization needs to make in order to move towards the ultimate goals within a period of time. The main points discussed, and the decisions made at meetings should be recorded for future reference. This is called as minutes of the meeting.

When developing the constitution (known also as statute), make sure that it conforms to government regulations. It should include the name, address, and purpose of the organization, membership rights and duties, structure of the organization including general assembly, board, auditors, and responsibilities of the different bodies or committees in the organization. As an organization of the deaf, your constitution should clarify that deaf persons must comprise a majority of the board of your organization. Please refer to the [module about statutes](#) for more details about how to make statutes of the organization.

### **7. Providing organizational, management and leadership training**

At this stage, you should provide members, board and staff necessary knowledge and skills to ensure that they can work effectively towards the goals. When planning the organizational training it is important to keep in mind that every individual has positive resources and capacities which are useful for the development of the organization. Training should offer the basic facts about the structure of organization, decision making procedure, the rights, and duties.



When establishing the organization, it is natural that persons with more education, experience and skills have a leading role in the process. However, it is extremely important that at an early stage all people who are involved develop organizational skills. You should avoid dependency on a few individuals. If only a few persons are involved in the activities of the organization, their workload will soon exceed their capacity. Also, if these people are for

some reason to unable to continue their work, the whole organization will be weakened. Avoid dominance by a few individuals. When working in an organization, people involved will gain a lot of knowledge, skills, and experience. It means that others may be left out and their opinions will not receive the same attention than the dominating group. Avoid elitism, where you start thinking that the concerns of others with less education and experience are less important.

### **8. Organising Annual General Meeting (AGM)**

General meeting is the supreme decision-making body of the organization. During the meeting, you should deal with acceptance of the annual report of the year's work given by the board, acceptance of the annual financial report (annual account and balance sheet) given by the board, plan of action for the next year, the budget for the next year, election of the president of the organization and members of the organization as stated in the constitution, election of the auditors, issues raised by members or member organizations. The responsibility for preparing the documents lies with the board. If the staff has prepared them, they must be accepted by the board before they are submitted. It is the duty and right of the representatives at the general meeting to ask for clarification of the reports on past activities, for example to see whether plans have been implemented. If necessary, an explanation from the board should be given. Suggestions from members present at the Annual General Meeting concerning future and budget should be welcomed. The evaluation and critique of past work should take place in an open atmosphere. Any mistakes that have happened should be discussed in order to avoid them in the future.

### **9. Setting up branches and clubs**

After having worked for some time, you will realize the need for setting up local branches and clubs. The tasks of a national organization differ from that of a local branch or club. While national organization is needed for planning and implementing national programs concerning deaf people, cooperating with government agencies and other partners, local branches and clubs are also needed. The most important one is the need to meet other deaf persons regularly. This is easier if you have a local club with regular meetings. A club of the deaf is also needed for implementing the national policies on a local level. For more information about how to set up local branches or clubs, please see the module "[How to Establish Local Branches](#)".

**Establishing a national organization of the deaf when you have local branches or clubs**



In case if there are several local clubs in various parts of your country, it is important to establish a national organization. Here, the process is different and preparation work is very important. All existing clubs should have the opportunity to participate in the first meeting to discuss the matter.

Organizations can be structured in many ways. By discussing differences, you will clarify the form best suited to your needs. See the different examples of organisations in the module [“Internal and External Structure”](#).

### **Case study: Kosovo**

After the Kosovo war, there was no association which represent the deaf community in Kosovo. Prior to establishing a national organization of the deaf in Kosovo, there were 7 deaf clubs in the 7 major cities in Kosovo led by hearing people. Although deaf people were involved in their deaf clubs, they did not have a strong influence in the decision making. Information was passed by older deaf members to younger deaf members. There was no contact or co-operation between deaf clubs in Kosovo.

In 2001, a situational analysis of the Kosovar deaf community was carried out over two months by the Finnish Association of the Deaf. They carried out a seminar with deaf community and representatives from 11 deaf clubs in Kosovo. As a result of the seminar, a Kosovar Deaf Working Group comprising six members was formed in 2002. This group were elected to represent the Kosovar deaf community in seeking project partnership with the Finnish Association of the Deaf. Based on these priorities a funding application was submitted with three main objectives: **Organisational Training** to build the capacity of the deaf community, its clubs and to establish a functioning and representative peak organisation for the Kosovar deaf community. Basic level **Sign Language Interpreter Training** to enable interpreters to gain greater skills and consequently provide more equal opportunities for deaf citizens and facilitate greater independence for deaf people in Kosovar society. **Sign Language Work** to increase the status of Kosovar Sign Language by producing information and training related to Kosovar Sign Language. In 2003, the Finnish Association of the Deaf obtained funding for a three-year period from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland to implement a training project that entailed all three of the objectives identified at the seminar.

In 2004, the project began its implementation, and the project team was formed with three local staff members and two international advisors. This team then conducted an intensive survey with 14 local deaf clubs and groups of interpreters. This included meeting with two deaf clubs located in the Serbian enclaves of northern Mitrovica and Gracanica. The Steering Committee's role was to monitor the projects activities and finances and to be involved with decisions regarding the future direction of a peak body for the deaf community. The overall aim of this organisational training was to advance these local deaf clubs into democratic associations capable of fulfilling their organisational responsibilities by providing organisational services and information to their local deaf members and advocate for deaf issues.

# How to Establish a National Association



**BUILD A DEAF  
ORGANISATION**

In March 2007, the Kosovar deaf community formed an official board for the Kosovar Association of the Deaf as a peak body organisation that is formally supported by 11 local deaf associations across Kosovo. As a result of organizational management training in 2018, all board members in local and national associations are deaf in Kosovo. Gender balance among board members has increased and there is better democracy and transparency. There are more active women and youth in decision-making. There is a better transparency

between local and national level. 6 out of 11 local boards can run their association independently. 5 out of them need additional support. Kosovar Sign Language was recognized in 2010.